

OPEN LETTERS.

THE TROPICAL LABORATORY.

To the Editors of the Botanical Gazette.—The desirability and great value of a permanent research laboratory in the American tropics must be evident to every student of plant or animal life. But it should be remembered that a large amount of work has already been done in looking over the ground, and very competent opinion on the subject is already available. Would it not be well to consider first the results already reached? It is well known that parties of zoologists from the Johns Hopkins University, under the lead of Professor W. K. Brooks, have several times visited different parts of the West Indies, including three trips to the island of Jamaica. Their experience has led to the choice of this island as best adapted for a permanent establishment or for periodic visits. A stay of two months in several parts of Jamaica has convinced me that it offers equal advantages for botanical study. It would be an unfortunate mistake to make such an establishment as is proposed exclusively botanical or zoological. Aside from the added strength which the cooperation of both biological groups would give it, the very great mutual advantage of the association must be self evident.

As compared with many other parts of the tropics, the climate of Jamaica is exceptionally healthful, and it is remarkably free from poisonous animals. Its continental character makes possible a rich and varied flora, and within a few miles one may pass from the sea level to the summit of Blue Mountain peak, 7360 feet high. The island is a British colony, which means that life and property are secure, the roads fine, the language English. It is accessible by steamer, at least once a week, from either Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or Baltimore, and the principal points are now connected by railroad. There are on the island two interesting botanic gardens, at Castleton and Gordon Town, under the direction of Mr. Wm. Fawcett, F.L.S., Director of Public Gardens and Plantations, who would doubtless give such an enterprise every encouragement and much valuable aid. Lady Blake, the talented wife of the governor of the colony, Sir Henry Blake, might be expected to be interested in the movement, having several years ago proposed the establishment of an international biological station in Jamaica.

If I may be permitted a definite suggestion as to location, wholly from the standpoint of the botanist, I should say that the north side is far preferable

to the south side. And I believe the neighborhood of Port Antonio, which is the chief stopping place of most of the fruit steamers visiting the island, and therefore a very convenient location, offers unsurpassed natural advantages for the study of the flora of both sea and land. By all means let us have the laboratory, but let it be on a broad and solid basis of general cooperation.—J. E. HUMPHREY, *Johns Hopkins University*.

BOTANIC GARDENS.

To the Editors of the Botanical Gazette:— I am glad to see the increased interest manifested in our country for botanic gardens, as their influence for good on all classes of persons is far-reaching. A well equipped university in these days is supplied with library, general museum, herbarium, laboratories, and department of publication. As these institutions are located in or near cities, there is no need for them to duplicate what abounds in the public parks. In the colder portions of the year cultivated plants can be purchased of commercial growers at moderate cost.

The two most common and important defects of many colleges, in the estimation of the botanist, are a botanical museum and a garden in which are grown hardy plants, including trees. If well designed and well kept, these gardens are great attractions to visitors as well as useful to all classes of students.

Universities, colleges, schools of almost every kind, need the use of a botanic garden more and more. As the country becomes older many of the most interesting plants are driven farther and farther back; the roadsides are "slicked up," the odd corners cleared, the wood lot is pastured, the swamps are ditched and burned over. People of all classes are growing up in ignorance of many kinds of wild plants that were once common. In many places people who live in the country are becoming much like those who dwell in the city; both alike crave something which cannot be supplied except by contact with trees, shrubs, grass, weeds, nature clothed in green.

Again, most young people who acquire a love for botany acquire it by coming in contact with nature, especially if accompanied by some skillful guide. Enthusiasm in this direction rarely comes from a study of books alone. Even a garden of small pretensions is of great value, greater than can be understood by those who have tried to rely solely upon the woods and swamps for supplies. It is not costly, and a small start will usually lead to an appreciation by all who see it, and some will assist in securing something better.

With our modern way of sending students to nature for their facts regarding plants, it becomes more and more the habit of teachers to assign certain definite subjects, one or more to each pupil, for essay or thesis. In the